

## **REVISED**

September 9, 2003

The Honorable Board of Supervisors  
County of Los Angeles  
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**APPROVAL OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT 2003-2013  
(STRATEGIC PLAN)  
(ALL DISTRICTS) (3-VOTES)**

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOUR BOARD:**

1. Approve the Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development (Attachment 1), as submitted by the County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee).
2. Authorize the Planning Committee, with staff support from the Office of Child Care, within the Service Integration Branch of the Chief Administrative Office, to promote the Strategic Plan throughout the County of Los Angeles and facilitate its implementation.
3. Instruct all County departments that fund, sponsor, or develop child care and development services to apply the standards, which will be developed as a result of the Strategic Plan, for staff qualifications and compensation in their selection and evaluation of program operators for all child care and development-related facilities.
4. Instruct all County departments to inform their employees, at least annually, of child care related benefits and resources and direct them to the Chief Administrative Office, Service Integration Branch, Office of Child Care Web Site to find out additional information about the Strategic Plan.

### **PURPOSE OF RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Approval of the Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development by your Board and the County Superintendent of Schools will fulfill a State mandate for the Planning Committee to “prepare a comprehensive Countywide child care plan designed to mobilize public and private resources to address identified needs, §8499.5 (b) (1).”

### **JUSTIFICATION**

The Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development provides a common vision and goals for improving the quality, availability, access to early care and education, as well as supervised school-age enrichment services for children and families. Your Board’s approval of the Strategic Plan will assist the Planning Committee in mobilizing and aligning the efforts of public and private organizations to achieve the common vision and goals.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The Strategic Plan was developed by the Planning Committee as part of its mandate from the California Department of Education (CDE). Costs associated with the Strategic Plan’s development and portions of implementation are covered through the annual Local Planning Contract from CDE, which funds the existing Planning Committee’s activities and staff support.

The Strategic Plan states that its implementation, led by the Planning Committee, will involve individual and collective efforts of community members, public and private organizations, employers, and government bodies at the Federal, State, and local levels. Additional funding necessary to enhance child care services, as described in the Plan, will be pursued by various stakeholders from a variety of sources, both public and private.

### **FACTS AND PROVISIONS**

The Planning Committee is mandated by the State Education Code to conduct a Countywide needs assessment at least every five years and to develop a comprehensive Countywide plan for child care and development based on the needs described in the assessment. In August 2000, your Board and the County of Los Angeles Superintendent of Schools, endorsed the Planning Committee’s completed needs assessment report. In the ensuing months, a work group of Planning Committee representatives and other community members, including parents and providers, met to frame a strategic plan. Participants brought a variety of perspectives and expertise in public policy, business management, early childhood education, and child care service

delivery to the planning process. Participants represented the cultural and economic diversity of the County of Los Angeles.

The work group was guided by both the Vision of the County of Los Angeles for Children and Families, and by the Planning Committee's own mission: *to engage parents, child care providers, allied organizations, community, and public agencies in collaborative planning efforts to improve the overall child care infrastructure of the County of Los Angeles, including the quality and continuity, affordability and accessibility of child care and development services for all families.* It was decided that the outcomes and goals for the Strategic Plan should align with the County's Vision and Strategic Plan, and in particular, Goal 5: "Children and Families' Well-Being."

The five outcome areas of the Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development are: 1) Consistently High-Quality Child Care; 2) Well-Qualified and Well-Compensated Workforce; 3) Access to a Sufficient Supply of Child Care; 4) Affordable Access to Child Care; and 5) Customer-Focused Infrastructure.

Beginning in late 2000 and continuing through Spring 2003, nearly 30 presentations of the draft Strategic Plan were made to groups such as the Southern California Association for the Education of Young Children (SCAEYC); Pasadena School-Age Care Consortium; Family Child Care Associations; Executive Service Corps; County of Los Angeles Children's Planning Council, County of Los Angeles Policy Roundtable for Child Care; Child Care Directors' Networks; and many other agencies. Both verbal and written comments were requested and received. The comments were reviewed by the work group and changes were incorporated by consensus.

In August 2003, formal communication with the Universal Preschool Initiative Planning Team was established and a presentation on the Strategic Plan was made before the full Los Angeles County First 5 LA Commission.

### **IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES**

The Planning Committee will use the Strategic Plan to positively impact the quality, availability, and accessibility of early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment services for children and families of the County of Los Angeles. The Strategic Plan will serve as a tool for guiding the development of policy recommendations in the County and assist with effectively linking initiatives to integrate early care and education with other services designed to improve outcomes for children and families.

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At the June 11, 2003 meeting of the Policy Roundtable for Child Care, Roundtable members endorsed the Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development and confirmed the Roundtable's role as a Principal Partner on Outcome Area 1, Strategy 3 and Outcome Area IV, Strategy 1.

### **CONCLUSION**

Upon adoption by your Board and the County Superintendent of Schools, the Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development will be submitted to CDE.

Respectfully submitted,

BONNIE BAILER, Chair  
County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee

ASD:KMS

Attachment

c: Policy Roundtable for Child Care  
Children's Planning Council  
First 5 LA Commission

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*Forging the Future:*  
County of Los Angeles Strategic Plan  
for  
Child Care and Development  
2003-2013

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Developed By:  
County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee  
June 2003

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Office of Child Care would like to thank the County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee Strategic Planning Work Group, and all of the individuals and groups who contributed facts, insight, and content to the Strategic Plan and this document.

In addition, special thanks are due to Catherine Atkin, Anne Broussard, Scott Moore, Gay Macdonald, Nancy Wyatt, and Craig Lancaster, who helped conceptualize this Strategic Plan. We also acknowledge the contributions of Lloyd Kajikawa, Michele Sartell, Mary Hruby, and Ellen Deker, who continued to work on the Plan contributing to the language and layout of the document.

The Office of Child Care and the Strategic Planning Work Group would like to thank Bonnie Bailer, Chair of the Child Care Planning Committee, for her unwavering leadership during the Plan's development and approval process.

Finally, we offer our appreciation to Crystal Stairs, the Child Care Resource Center, and the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles for making their facilities available during the planning process.



**The Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development is  
dedicated to:**

**Vivian Weinstein**

1917-2000

**Mentor to those who work on behalf of children,  
Moral Compass, who helped set the direction  
of policy and practice,  
and tireless Communicator of a vision  
for nurturing and protecting our children,  
in the hope that her vision lives within this document.**

*Thoughts on Planning and Vision*

*by Karen Hill-Scott, Ed.D.*

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“Are we there yet?” Anyone who has traveled with children has heard my brother’s familiar refrain. Having no real concept of time and distance, young children cannot comprehend how long it takes to reach a destination that is so far away you can not even see it on the horizon. They cannot grasp how a map or guidebook helps us get where we are going, since it is the car, not the map, that is rolling down the highway.

As we get older, our developmental capacity enables us to formulate a plan, map our route, and even envision how things will look and feel when we get there. This same capacity for conceptualization is generalized to most areas of life. We go to college because we believe those years of education will provide a pathway to better life opportunities. We take vitamins and supplements because we aim to improve our health and possibly extend our lives. Most major decisions, from selecting a job to selecting a spouse, are based on a long-term expectation of benefit, even though the actual outcome is not certain.

For anyone who has studied social policy, it is a frustrating paradox that the human ability to plan and conceptualize does not seem to generalize to public investments. Virtually, all policy is indexed to election cycles and the short-term feasibility of getting a bill passed through a political window of opportunity. Sometimes, there is very little focus on whether or not the policy will make a constructive difference, even in the short term. Polemics can override rational thought and, as a result, policy-making does not follow mature patterns of thinking.

Public policy tends to hover around the status quo, with very small shifts in one direction or another. Charles Lindblom and David Braybrooke coined this approach *disjointed incrementalism*, in their classic book A Strategy of Decision (1970).

Charles Lindblom and David Braybrooke defended *disjointed incrementalism* as a strategy that simplifies complex problems and limits the number of policy options that are contemplated.

They felt it permitted an adjustment of objectives to fit the politics of the moment. It led to reformulation of problems as data became available. However, *disjointed incrementalism* also had the chilling effect of resisting constructive change, avoiding long-term planning, and most importantly, rejecting comprehensive reform in any system. The tendency is to focus on the expedient, not on the effectiveness, of a policy.

Fortunately, there is always a healthy tension between those who cleave to *disjointed incrementalism* and those who see the potential for long-term planning around a major policy goal. The result of that tension is what we might call *systematic incrementalism*. In *systematic incrementalism*, the broad outlines of a policy goal are formulated, preferably through a democratic or pluralistic process. Then, at every opportunity that presents itself, the work around the margins takes society closer to achievement of the larger goal.

Each incremental accomplishment widens the circle of support for the overall goal, making each round of incrementalism somewhat wider and deeper than the previous one. Over time, entire systems can be developed from component policies that relate to one another systematically. The system is comprehensive, but it is constructed of the building blocks of rational planning, political discourse, and public participation.

Vivian Weinstein, to whom this Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development is dedicated, was a master of *systematic incrementalism*, though she would never have thought to call it that. As tough as a street fighter on children's issues, Ms. Weinstein was just as tenacious about achieving her bigger goals. She appeared to work most effectively in the here and now, pushing legislation, advocacy, and regulations in the directions that were feasible in that moment. But she never took her eyes off the larger prize, sometimes surprising her colleagues who might have thought a particular issue was dead.

Because of Vivian Weinstein, most of the "child care" funds in the State are administered by the Department of Education. If she worked on this issue one year, she pushed it for twenty. She began with respite care, and gradually worked with other California organizations to be sure all categories of child care funds managed by the California Department of Social Services were transferred to the Department of Education.

The overarching goal was not simply the transfer of funds, but to imbue child care with the tenets, purposes, and protections of public education. Vivian Weinstein died before the goals of universal coverage and universal quality were attained. However, this plan translates Vivian Weinstein's underlying thought trajectory into a system of child development services that should be created over the next ten years. **This plan is a conscious and explicit statement to the broad community of supporters that change may not be accomplished overnight, but it can be achieved in increments.** We, as child care advocates, just have to remember to be focused on the goal and be systematic about testing each new policy idea to see if it gets us closer to that goal.

The families in the County of Los Angeles will be lucky to have major initiatives accelerate some aspects of system creation. As this occurs, it is the responsibility of all who work on child care and development issues to integrate the intent of this plan with the content of other

similar plans at the State and local levels. Remembering that the public must be able to make sense of the policy, we should aim for a system that is so recognizably different and better than what we have, it will be easy to answer the question, “Are we there yet?” We will be able to click our mouse, make a phone call, or drive around our neighborhoods and see the obvious, “Yes, we are definitely there.”

Karen Hill-Scott, Ed.D.

Los Angeles, California

October 25, 2002

**Forging the Future: A Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development  
for the County of Los Angeles 2003-2013 (Strategic Plan)  
County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee**

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*Executive Summary*

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The County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee was established in response to a Legislative mandate. The Planning Committee is responsible for coordinating planning for child care and development services in the County. This 10-year Strategic Plan will serve as a tool to meet that mandate and guide the growth of needed services.

Policy advocates and planners consider child care and development to be a critical infrastructure, necessary to the healthy functioning of our society. There are two components to the infrastructure: **providers of direct care** and **supporting systems**. Over the years, the infrastructure of child care and development has grown in a fragmented way. In some cases, this fragmentation has been driven by policy decisions that served to arbitrarily separate the *development* (early education) from the *care* in child care and development. In addition, funding sources have inconsistently dictated growth or standards for one segment of the child care and development infrastructure, but not for another.

The child care and development infrastructure in the County of Los Angeles is inadequate:

- The County of Los Angeles lacks an adequate supply of child care and development options to meet the needs of families. The number of young children whose parents are in the workforce or attending school far exceeds the number of licensed spaces available. The 2000 Child Care Needs Assessment for the County of Los Angeles, "*Child Care Counts*," indicates a shortfall of over 300,000 spaces, primarily for infants and school-age children. The need for additional licensed spaces must be addressed over the next ten years.
- While there are more than 125,000 children enrolled in early care and education or supervised school-age enrichment services whose care is fully or partially paid through government sources, there are another 80,000 children on waiting lists for subsidized services and programs in the County of Los Angeles. Full-time child care costs two-to three-times more than college tuition. Even though child care and development choices are available, families may not be able to access them because of cost.
- Research has shown that high-quality child care environments positively impact the development of young children in the areas of language development and expression, social maturity, attention, understanding group process, positive relationships with peers, and cooperative behavior. Unfortunately, public policy has lagged far behind the collective wisdom presented in the research and, therefore, has not adequately addressed the costs associated with providing quality child care.

***Forging the Future: A Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development***  
**for the County of Los Angeles 2003-2013 (Strategic Plan)**  
**County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee**

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In developing a Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development that addresses the issues of **availability**, **accessibility**, and **quality**, the Child Care Planning Committee and its Strategic Planning Work Group are committed to the following values:

- All children are entitled to the best possible care and education environments;
- High quality child care and development has direct benefits for children, their families, and society, therefore, it must be the focus of healthy public investment;
- The physical and social environments in which children are cared for must meet consistently high standards;
- All adults working with children in early care and education environments must be thoroughly educated and trained to work effectively with children;
- Direct services and supporting systems must meet the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families; and
- Direct services and supporting systems must be prepared to appropriately address the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs, and their families.

The Child Care Planning Committee arrived at the following outcome areas and goals for the Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development, based on research, community meetings, and conversations with parents, child care providers, policy-makers, K-12 educators, and public and private organizations:

- I. Outcome Area: Consistently High-Quality  
Goal: Ensure that high standards for early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment.
- II. Outcome Area: Well-Qualified and Well-Compensated Workforce  
Goal: Ensure early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment staff are well-qualified and well-compensated.
- III. Outcome Area: Access to a Sufficient Supply  
Goal: Ensure that all families in the County of Los Angeles have access to a sufficient supply of quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment options for children from birth to age 13.
- IV. Outcome Area: Affordable Access to Child Care  
Goal: Ensure that all families have access to quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment, regardless of family income.
- V. Outcome Area: Customer-Focused Infrastructure  
Goal: Ensure that the child care and development infrastructure of the County of Los Angeles will be customer-focused, providing consistently high-quality services and information leading to appropriate care arrangements based on the needs of families.

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Each goal is equally important; progress must occur concurrently to comprehensively improve the child care and development infrastructure, and to achieve the stated outcomes related to **quality, availability, and accessibility**.

The implementation of this Strategic Plan will depend on the coordinated efforts of individuals, groups, agencies, and government bodies. The County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee will be responsible, on an ongoing basis, for coordinating stakeholders' contributions to the Plan, and annually, monitoring progress in achieving the goals of this Plan.

## Section I. Foundations

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### *Strategic Plan Vision*

Children in the County of Los Angeles will have easy access to high-quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment services. The adults who, as partners to parents, provide the early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment services will be well-educated and trained, and will be well-compensated based on their education, experience, and levels of responsibility. Organizations that provide information, administer subsidies, and monitor regulations will work in alignment with parents and providers of early care and education to support the essential purpose of an effective infrastructure: to nurture, protect, and educate children ages 0-13, regardless of family income or where they live in the County of Los Angeles.

### *Child Care Planning Committee Mission*

The mission of the Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee) is to engage parents, child care providers, allied organizations, community, and public agencies in collaborative planning efforts to improve the overall child care infrastructure of the County of Los Angeles, including the quality and continuity, affordability, and accessibility of child care and development services for all families.

### *What is the Strategic Plan?*

**The Strategic Plan is a road map.** The Plan describes the direction and the destination for the many stakeholders involved in building, improving, and maintaining a high-quality system of child care and development services.

**The Strategic Plan is a tool for evaluation.** The Plan, as a whole, approaches planning at a high level, with a long-term horizon (ten years). The Plan applies a systems approach toward outcomes. As such, if the programs, providers, and supports that serve families and children improve, the results will be improved outcomes for individual children. The Plan describes what will be different if the stated goals and objectives are achieved, and links the goals and objectives with indicators in order to measure progress. Progress toward achievement of goals will be included in subsequent implementation status reports.

**The Strategic Plan is a guide for continuous, multi-level planning.** The Plan invites the participation of many individuals and groups who can use the broad framework of the Plan and its vision to develop their own individual, organizational, and community-level goals and accompanying implementation plans and projects.

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***The Strategic Plan is a tool for project management.*** The Plan provides a framework for implementation. Implementation will be accomplished using a task-level approach with a one- to two-year horizon. The Plan will enable the Planning Committee to coordinate, facilitate, and monitor progress of activities related to plan goals conducted by both the Planning Committee and its community partners.

The Strategic Plan links stated goals, strategies, and objectives with the quantitative and qualitative needs assessment data in *Child Care Counts (2000)*. The goals are derived from the findings of the needs assessment and community analysis of the current infrastructure for child care and development. Collectively, the goals of the Strategic Plan define an infrastructure that will support the realization of the outcomes related to Goal 5 of the Los Angeles County Strategic Plan:

***“Improve the well-being of children and families in the County of Los Angeles as measured by the achievements in the five outcome areas adopted by the Board of Supervisors: Good Health; Economic Well-Being; Safety and Survival; Emotional and Social Well-Being; and Education/Workforce Readiness.”***

### *Strategic Plan Guiding Values*

The Planning Committee and its Strategic Planning Work Group embraced the following values in the development of the Strategic Plan:

- All children are entitled to the best possible care and education environments;
- High-quality child care and development has direct benefits for children, their families, and society and, therefore, must be the focus of healthy public investment;
- The physical and social environments in which children are cared for must meet consistently high standards;
- All adults working with children in early care and education environments must be thoroughly educated and trained to work effectively with children;
- Direct services and supporting systems must meet the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families; and
- Direct services and supporting systems must be prepared to appropriately address the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs, and their families.



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*Social, Political, and Economic Context*

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The last decade has seen extraordinary changes affecting the field of child care and development. These include:

- New research findings about early brain development;
- A renewed emphasis on “school readiness and school success;” and
- Major changes in public funding and goals for the welfare system.

These changes have converged to create a spotlight on how we nurture, protect, and educate the youngest members of our society. The following findings demonstrate the urgent need to invest in creating high-quality child care and development options for the younger, and most vulnerable, residents of the County of Los Angeles.

- Scientists have always been fascinated by the human brain, its formation, biology, size, functioning, and capacities. In recent years, much has been learned about the human brain through extraordinary research. Among the most important and far-reaching discoveries is the critical role of early life experiences on the development of the human brain. Neurobiologists consistently report the significant influence of proper stimulation on such brain functions as language, vision, aggression, emotions, and learning.<sup>1</sup>
- Research studies show that the results of an individual’s growth and development depend on the critical and continual interplay between *nature* (an individual’s genetic endowment) and *nurture* (nutrition, surroundings, interactions and relationships, care, and stimulation). Furthermore, early care has a decisive and long-lasting impact on how humans develop their ability to learn and their capacity to regulate their own emotions.<sup>2</sup>
- *Neurons to Neighborhoods - the Science of Early Childhood Development* describes the importance of early life experiences, as well as the inseparable and highly interactive influences of genetics and environment on the development of the brain and the unfolding of human behavior. It also reports the powerful capabilities, complex emotions, and essential social skills that develop during the earliest years of life.<sup>3</sup>
- In addition, ensuring that children are “ready for school,” however defined, has become a major public policy goal.<sup>4</sup> We now know that children who begin school physically, emotionally, and mentally prepared, are better able to succeed. If schools are ready to meet the ongoing needs of maturing children, more children will complete school and seek advanced education. Successful educational achievement boosts the earning power of individuals and increases our nation’s economic potential.

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- At the same time, “ending welfare as we know it,” is dependent on providing key supports to very low-income families. One such support, child care, is often critical to a family’s transition to economic well-being.

These trends and policy directions contribute to the need for child care and development services and establish high expectations for results. Child care and development is recognized as: an essential service enabling parents to work; a strategy enabling children to be ready for, and to succeed in school; and an intervention enabling children and families to overcome risks to a child’s healthy development. The fact is that good quality child care and development nurtures, protects, and educates.<sup>5</sup>

The demand and expectations for child care have resulted in tremendous increases in funding in the last decade. There has been an explosion in the diversity of care types, affiliations, and sponsorship. However, a comprehensive, coordinated, and effective system of high-quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment has not yet emerged, despite the growth in resources. This is largely due to the fact that our society lacks a single, unified vision of how we educate, nurture, and protect all of our children.

### *Child Care and Development Infrastructure*

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**“In-fra-struc-ture”** *n.* *The basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a community or society, such as transportation and communications systems, water and power lines, and public institutions, including schools, post offices, and prisons.*

*American Heritage  
Dictionary*

Policy advocates and planners consider child care and development to be a critical infrastructure, necessary to the healthy functioning of our society. There are two components to the infrastructure: **providers of direct care** and **supporting systems**.<sup>6</sup> The providers are direct-service entities that offer child care and development to children, including: Head Start; full-day child care centers; part-day preschool programs in schools and private agencies; family child care homes (both small and large); license-exempt providers; infant/toddler and early intervention programs; public agencies; government departments; and school-age supervision and enrichment programs.

The supporting systems within the child care and development infrastructure include: the consumer information and payment systems of Resource and Referral (R&R) and Alternative Payment Programs (APP); public agencies and government departments that fund services and determine eligibility for those services; municipalities, school districts, community agencies, and religious institutions that sponsor or administer services; and the institutions and agencies that train and certify individuals and regulate programs providing child care and development services.

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*For the purpose of this Strategic Plan, the phrase “child care and development” includes early care and education environments (homes and centers), license-exempt care, and care and supervision for school-age children.*

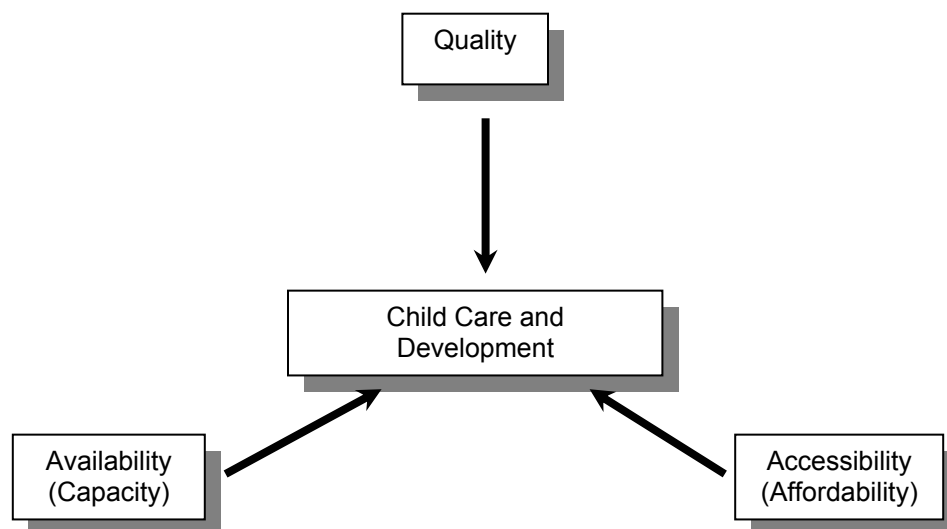
Over the years, the infrastructure of child care and development has grown in a fragmented way. In some cases, this fragmentation has been driven by policy decisions that served to arbitrarily separate the *development* (early education) from the *care* in child care and development. In addition, funding sources have inconsistently dictated growth or standards for one segment of the child care and development infrastructure, but not for another. For example, State child development funds are allocated to both child care center programs and APPs that pay child care providers on behalf of eligible families.

In the case of direct funding to child care centers, there are extensive requirements related to staff qualifications and curriculum as a condition of the funding. On the other hand, no such requirements exist for providers paid through an APP. Other examples of fragmentation are the various after school funding sources, each of which has a different operating standard. The result of this fragmentation is a child care and development system that is extensive, but lacks coordination and consistent quality in the delivery of services to children and families.

**Quality/Availability/Accessibility**

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In examining the infrastructure for child care and development, three factors must be considered in undertaking strategic planning, as illustrated in the following graphic:



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### *Quality*

Research has shown that high-quality child care environments positively impact the development of young children in the areas of language development and expression, social maturity, attention, understanding group process, positive relationships with peers, and cooperative behavior. Longitudinal studies have further shown that high-quality child care continues to influence child outcomes throughout the school years.<sup>7</sup> Other studies have demonstrated a decrease in the need for special education, decreased contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and higher school achievement and graduation rates. Unfortunately, public policy has lagged far behind the collective wisdom presented in the research and, therefore, has not adequately addressed the costs associated with providing quality child care.

Parent fees are the largest source of revenue for child care services, yet the cost of providing quality child care and development services far exceeds most families' ability to pay. The average rate for child care is more than many families can afford on their own. Federal and State government funding intended to subsidize the cost of care for children of low-income families is often insufficient to support quality care options that are proven to prepare children for school. Government programs base their reimbursement formulas on the average cost of care in the marketplace, rather than the true cost of quality. Children benefit most from consistent care provided by experienced, well-prepared teachers and caregivers. Insufficient resources often result in depressed staff wages and a corresponding lack of experience and training on the part of the teachers and caregivers. Revenue, whether from parent fees or government subsidies, is often insufficient to compensate caregivers at a level commensurate with the standards for education and competency that should be in place to ensure quality care. Ultimately, the ability to recruit and keep highly trained and qualified teachers and caregivers is severely impacted.

### *Availability*

The County of Los Angeles lacks an adequate supply of child care and development options to meet the needs of families. The 2000 Child Care Needs Assessment for the County of Los Angeles, "*Child Care Counts*" indicates that the County of Los Angeles has approximately 189,000 licensed spaces in center-based programs and family child care homes: 25,000 infant/toddler spaces, 128,000 preschool spaces, and 36,000 school-age spaces. However, the number of young children whose parents are in the workforce or attending school far exceeds the number of licensed spaces available. *Child Care Counts* estimates a shortfall of over 300,000 spaces, primarily for infants and school-age children. The need for additional licensed spaces must be addressed over the next ten years. Steps to improve the availability of child care options are an integral part of this Strategic Plan. An update to the 2000 Child Care Needs Assessment, to be conducted in 2003, will help sharpen the focus on how great the gap between capacity and demand is, and what particular geographic sections of the County are most impacted.

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A second element of current and potential capacity is “license-exempt” care. Some child care providers, individuals, and programs, by their nature and function, are exempt from licensing requirements. While some of these programs have set their own standards, most exempt care has no formal health, safety, or quality standards against which to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting the needs of young children. Because exempt care providers are not licensed, and often not “registered” or listed in any public database, the availability of this type of care is difficult to measure. However, license-exempt care is an integral part of the child care and development infrastructure, particularly in communities where the supply of licensed care is currently limited and/or unaffordable, or does not meet the special needs of families.

Whether exempt care supplements or is a substitute for licensed care, is a matter of great debate. Some parents choose exempt care because of family relationships or because exempt care is a better fit for their needs than licensed care options. For example, a family whose parents both work one or more jobs at various hours of the day and night will find it difficult to locate licensed care options that accommodate shift changes and non-traditional work hours. Other families that are using exempt care based on economic pressures simply do not have the financial resources to pay for licensed care. And finally, many families use exempt care because the licensed care choices in their communities are undesirable or non-existent.

#### *Accessibility*

The cost of purchasing child care in the County of Los Angeles ranges from a few dollars per week for publicly subsidized school-age programs to more than \$250 per week for full-time infant care. Cost is dependent on revenue sources and the type of administering agency, ages served, and often the geographical location. The average range of fees charged, in calendar year 2000, for non-subsidized, full-time child care and development services in the County of Los Angeles were:

*A major challenge in the next decade for child care planners is to better calculate the real demand for license-exempt care and to encourage the application of quality standards and supports for this type of care.*

- Infants and toddlers: \$100 to \$143 per week;
- Preschool ages: \$94 to \$97 per week; and
- School-age children: \$80 to \$94 per week.<sup>8</sup>

These average ranges are based on licensed, center-based and licensed family child care. At this level, full-time care for young children in the County costs between two-and-a-half times and four-times more than the annual tuition paid by a California resident attending a California State University.<sup>9</sup>

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While there are more than 125,000 children enrolled in early care and education or supervised school-age enrichment services whose care is fully, or partially paid through government sources, there are another 70,000 children on waiting lists for subsidized services and programs in the County of Los Angeles.<sup>10</sup> Even though child care and development choices are available, families may not be able to access them because of cost.

This Strategic Plan describes five outcome areas and related goals which address the factors of ***quality, availability, and accessibility***, which are interdependent. How we address the issues related to ***quality, availability, and accessibility*** will form the foundation for an infrastructure for child care and development services that will benefit all families. The goals of this Plan are also interdependent. Successfully addressing availability issues and reaching capacity goals, without also ensuring improved quality and accessibility, will not result in services that truly address the needs of all families and children. Each goal is equally important; progress must occur concurrently to comprehensively improve the child care and development infrastructure and achieve stated outcomes.

## Section II. Strategic Plan

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### *Outcome Areas, Goals, and Objectives*

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This Strategic Plan uses a systems improvement approach and is built upon a framework for improving five major outcome areas. Each outcome area has a relevant long-term goal. Each long-term goal is supported by specific strategies and objectives. The strategies, with their measurable objectives, describe how the goals can be achieved.

The outcome areas are the foundation of the Strategic Plan. In effect, the outcome areas identify the impact of successful implementation of the Plan. Each outcome area identifies a part of the child care and development infrastructure which needs improvement, and addresses one or more of the three primary factors: **quality**, **availability**, and **accessibility**. The outcome areas are:

- I. Consistently High-Quality Child Care;
- II. Well-Qualified and Well-Compensated Workforce;
- III. Access to a Sufficient Supply of Child Care;
- IV. Affordable Access to Child Care; and
- V. Customer-Focused Infrastructure.

The five outcome areas reflect the Strategic Plan's Vision of what child care and development infrastructure should be for the County of Los Angeles.

The goals are derived from the outcome areas and from the Vision. Each goal creates a tighter focus on some aspect of improving the infrastructure. For instance, the goal related to Outcome Area I, focuses on raising the standards for early care and education and for supervised school-aged enrichment. Raising standards will raise expectations and create greater accountability for quality within the infrastructure.

Each goal is linked to specific strategies that serve to further tighten the focus of efforts. Using the first outcome area as an example, the strategies include developing local standards for effective pre-school experiences, increasing the numbers of accredited programs/providers, and developing a process for evaluating quality and linking evaluation results to funding. Each of these strategies relates back to the goal of improving the standards of quality demonstrated in the various types of care available within the child care and development infrastructure.

Each strategy has long- and short-term objectives. The short-term objectives are listed under *Initial Short-Term Objectives*, and fall within the first year or two of the Plan's implementation. There are also long-term objectives that, when reached, will complete the strategy. The objectives, which flow from the selected strategies, are framed from the perspective of what is happening currently, what has been successful in the immediate past, and what actions are being proposed locally or across the country that may achieve the goals.

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The measurable objectives will be reviewed annually to assess progress, completion, and continued relevance in producing the results. The objectives are the most flexible component of this Strategic Plan, and should be reviewed and evaluated often. Objectives can be changed or added as circumstances and opportunities evolve, and as Principal Partners come forward to initiate action plans for the objectives.

Principal Partners have been, or will be, identified for each strategy/objective. These Partners are, for the most part, already engaged in activities that support the stated strategies and objectives in the Plan. Principal Partners are groups who are in a position to: 1) initiate, expand, or continue activities related to specific objectives; and 2) provide information on their progress to the Planning Committee as part of the ongoing evaluation of the Plan's impact.

The lead for implementation of the Plan is the Planning Committee. As the lead, the Planning Committee's role is to:

- 1) Identify and engage the Principal Partners, thus aligning multiple, Countywide efforts;
- 2) Promote the Plan to stakeholders and the general public in order to build public will in support of the overall goals;
- 3) Conduct or coordinate research tasks related to Plan objectives; and
- 4) Evaluate Plan progress and review/renew the objectives.

The following pages present the heart of the Strategic Plan: Outcome areas, goals, strategies, and objectives.



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**Outcome Area I: Consistently High Quality**

**Goal: Ensure high standards for early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment.**

<b>Strategy 1.</b>	<b>Initial Short-Term Objectives 2003-2005</b>	<b>Lead and Principal Partners</b>	<b>Long-Term Objectives</b>
Facilitate the development of local quality standards, applicable to all types of providers, to meet the expectations of providing a quality preschool experience.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By March 2004, contribute to the definition of "quality" and related standards developed for a County Preschool Initiative; and</li> <li>2. By April 2004, begin promotion of the quality standards among centers, family child care homes, and exempt-care providers.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Child Care Regional Resource Center</li> </ul>	By 2013, enable all settings and program types to meet the higher standards.
<b>Strategy 2.</b>			
Increase accreditation of centers and family child care homes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By June 2004, increase the number of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited centers by 25 percent over 2000 numbers;</li> <li>2. By June 2004, increase the number of National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accredited family child care homes by 100 percent; and</li> <li>3. By June 2004, increase the number of National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) accredited programs by 25 percent.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Southern California Association for the Education of Young Children (SCAEYC)</li> </ul>	By 2013: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 percent of all licensed centers will be accredited;</li> <li>• 10 percent of all licensed family child care homes will be accredited; and</li> <li>• 10 percent of all school-age programs will be accredited.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy 3.</b>			
Develop an annual evaluation and certification process for centers and homes based on accepted quality standards.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By March 2004, identify evaluation and certification programs used by other states, as possible models for the County of Los Angeles; and</li> <li>2. By October 2004, design a pilot program to test a local evaluation/certification process.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Policy Roundtable for Child Care</li> </ul>	By 2006, implement a pilot program. By 2013, include at least 50 percent of all centers and homes in the certification process.
<b>Strategy 4.</b>			
Develop recommendations for linking government subsidies to evaluation and certification results.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By August 2004, review models from other jurisdictions and determine the feasibility of a quality-linked payment system; and</li> <li>2. By January 2005, develop a policy recommendation for linking funding to quality.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• California Child Development Administrators Assoc.</li> <li>• Policy Roundtable for Child Care</li> </ul>	By 2007, develop legislative language that implements and funds the recommended policy linking funding to quality.

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**Outcome Area II: Well-Qualified and Well-Compensated Workforce**

**Goal: Ensure early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment staff are well-qualified and well-compensated.**

<b>Strategy 1.</b>	<b>Initial Short-Term Objectives 2003-2005</b>	<b>Lead and Principal Partners</b>	<b>Long-Term Objectives</b>
Develop policies and initiatives that enable early education and care personnel to earn wages comparable to workers in other fields with similar qualifications.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By July 2004, develop a model compensation scale for the County of Los Angeles;</li> <li>2. By July 2004, develop a statement on the "true cost of quality care;" and</li> <li>3. By January 2005, develop recommendations for appropriate government funding for early care and education services using the model compensation scale and the "true cost of quality care" statement.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• SCAEYC</li> </ul>	<p>By 2007, develop legislative language that implements and funds the recommended policy-linking funding to quality.</p> <p>By 2008, encourage use of the model compensation scale by 50 percent of municipal, community, and employer-related child care services.</p>
<b>Strategy 2</b>			
Facilitate standards and practices that enable early care and education personnel to meet professional standards, and demonstrate core competencies in their work with children.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By December 2003, begin work with the Community Colleges to identify system improvements to achieve greater academic and practical competency for students of child development;</li> <li>2. By June 2004, develop initiatives that will increase transfer rates to four-year colleges; and</li> <li>3. By June 2004, increase access to information on the Child Development Permit standards for providers/teachers, and promote increased education to upgrade permits.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Los Angeles Community College District</li> <li>• Child Care Regional Resource Center</li> </ul>	<p>By 2007, increase the number of child development students from Community Colleges who matriculate to four-year colleges by 25 percent.</p> <p>By 2010, increase the number of early care and education staff with a Bachelor of Arts degree by 50 percent.</p>
<b>Strategy 3.</b>			
Increase access to health care coverage for early care and education and supervised school-age staff enrichment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By July 2004, include the cost of health care in developing a model compensation scale and the "true cost of care" statement; and</li> <li>2. By December 2004, review existing health care plans and promote information about the availability of plans for child care employers and providers.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Center for Healthier Communities</li> <li>• Northridge Hospital</li> </ul>	By 2008, increase the number of the municipal, community, and employer-related child care services using the model compensation scale, including the provision of health care coverage, by 50 percent.

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**Outcome Area III: Access to a Sufficient Supply**

**Goal: Ensure that all families in the County of Los Angeles have access to a sufficient supply of quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment options for children from birth to age 13.**

<b>Strategy 1</b>	<b>Initial Short-Term Objectives 2003-2005</b>	<b>Lead and Principal Partners</b>	<b>Long Term Objectives</b>
Increase the supply of care in the County of Los Angeles, with special consideration for children with disabilities and other special needs, and for the cultural and linguistic diversity of families.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By December 2004, reduce barriers due to zoning regulations and expensive permit requirements in cities throughout the County;</li> <li>2. By January 2005, create an intermediary that improves access to funding for facility development; and</li> <li>3. By June 2005, facilitate a coordinated system of technical assistance for developing or expanding child care programs.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Public Counsel</li> <li>• Child Care Regional Resource Center</li> </ul>	<p>By 2013, reduce, by up to 50 percent, the gap between licensed capacity and demand.</p> <p>By 2013, encourage cities to include child care in their general and strategic plans.</p>
<b>Strategy 2</b>			
Increase the availability of appropriate options for children with disabilities and other special needs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By January 2004, ensure that each Resource and Referral program in the County of Los Angeles has a "Special Needs" referral specialist to assist parents and providers; and</li> <li>2. By March 2004, establish connections between child care providers and early intervention specialists, mental health specialists, and other therapists to enable providers to work effectively with children with disabilities and other special needs.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Pathways, lead for Special Needs Advisory Project (SNAP) Collaborative</li> </ul>	<p>By 2013, 50 percent of all child care providers will be able to serve children with disabilities and other special needs.</p> <p>By 2013, 30 percent of Los Angeles County colleges will offer certified training to work with children with disabilities and other special needs.</p> <p>By 2013, specialists in early intervention, etc., will work with 25 percent of the licensed providers.</p>
<b>Strategy 3</b>			
Increase the retention rate of licensed family child care providers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By December 2003, recommend policies for pre-licensure technical assistance to promote greater business viability for new providers; and</li> <li>2. By June 2005, develop recommendations of professional growth options for experienced family child care providers.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Community Care Licensing</li> <li>• R&amp;R Programs</li> <li>• Family Child Care Associations</li> </ul>	By January 2013, increase the retention rate of new family child care providers to at least 75 percent, annually.

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**Outcome Area IV: Affordable Access to Child Care**

**Goal: Ensure that all families have access to quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment regardless of family income.**

<b>Strategy 1</b>	<b>Initial Short Term Objectives 2003-2005</b>	<b>Lead and Principal Partners</b>	<b>Long Term Objectives</b>
Increase availability of publicly-funded subsidies for child care.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By June 2004, calculate the costs and benefits of fully funding subsidized services for all eligible County of Los Angeles families; and</li> <li>2. By December 2004, develop recommendations for financial support for fully-funded subsidized child care for eligible families.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• California Child Development Administrators Association</li> <li>• Policy Roundtable for Child Care</li> </ul>	By September 2007, develop, with other stakeholders, legislative language for both the California Legislature and Congress that will begin to address the need for increased funding.
<b>Strategy 2</b>			
Increase the employer/business role in assisting with the cost of quality child care.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By June 2004, compile a descriptive inventory of all employer/business models supporting child care; and</li> <li>2. By December 2004, initiate efforts to engage the business/employer community to support greater access to care for families.</li> </ol>	Child Care Planning Committee	By December 2013, increase by 100 percent, the number of employers and businesses contributing to the financial support of child care costs for employees, as compared to the number of employers contributing to child care costs in 2004.
<b>Strategy 3</b>			
Increase the involvement of cities, community organizations, foundations, and other groups in efforts to develop and maintain alternative financial supports and scholarships available to families who do not qualify for government child care subsidies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By September 2004, identify sliding scale fee models, scholarship programs, etc., that help underwrite the cost of quality child care for families of moderate income; and</li> <li>2. By January 2005, disseminate information on these models and encourage their implementation.</li> </ol>	Child Care Planning Committee	By December 2013, increase by 100 percent, the number of alternative financial support initiatives available to moderate-income families, as compared to the number of initiatives available to families in 2004.

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**Outcome Area V: Customer-Focused Infrastructure**

**Goal: Ensure that the child care and development infrastructure of the County of Los Angeles will be customer-focused, providing consistently high-quality services and information leading to appropriate care arrangements based on the needs of families.**

<b>Strategy 1</b>	<b>Initial Short-Term Objectives</b>	<b>Lead and Principal Partners</b>	<b>Long-Term Objectives</b>
Implement a Countywide Centralized Eligibility List (CEL) for families seeking subsidized child care.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By September 2003, assess the use of CEL and make improvements where needed;</li> <li>2. By December 2003, increase the number of participating contractors to 24;</li> <li>3. By December 2004, increase participating agencies to 50 percent of all State-funded contractors; and</li> <li>4. By December 2004, begin discussions with County departments about the steps required for accessing CEL through other County communication systems.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• CEL Pilot Agencies</li> </ul>	<p>By December 2006, the CEL will be used to register and search for eligible families by all CDE/CDD-funded contractors and Head Start agencies.</p> <p>By December 2007, identify on County Web Sites how to access CEL.</p>
<b>Strategy 2</b>			
Streamline and simplify the child care subsidy program requirements (by CDE/CDD) to minimize administrative cost, improve provider participation, and improve family access.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By January 2004, develop recommendations to simplify and standardize the rate structure for child care providers who contract with vendor-type subsidy programs;</li> <li>2. By September 2004, develop recommendations for streamlining program regulations and procedures; and</li> <li>3. By January 2005, initiate discussion with CDE/CDD and Legislators regarding multi-year contracts and contract consolidation.</li> </ol>	Child Care Planning Committee	<p>By 2008, encourage alignment of State- and Federally-funded program regulations and eligibility requirements.</p> <p>By 2010, CDE/CDD contractors will have multi-year contracts, and effective, easy reporting mechanisms.</p>
<b>Strategy 3</b>			
Improve families' access to information about the child care and development infrastructure to enable them to make effective decisions about the care of their children.	By December 2005, develop a Countywide plan for distribution of information about child care-related services.	Child Care Planning Committee	By December 2006, implement a Countywide plan for parents to access information about early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment.

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**Outcome Area V: Customer-Focused Infrastructure** (continued)

**Goal:** Ensure that the child care and development infrastructure of the County of Los Angeles will be customer-focused, providing consistently high-quality services and information leading to appropriate care arrangements based on the needs of families.

<b>Strategy 4</b>	<b>Initial Short-Term Objectives</b>	<b>Lead and Principal Partners</b>	<b>Long-Term Objectives</b>
Improve the customer service standards of all agencies that provide information, monitor regulations, administer subsidies, and offer other support to families and child care providers.	By March 2004, work with child care service agencies and other public and private agencies/departments that use, regulate, or administer child care-related services to review customer service standards, such as those developed and implemented by the County of Los Angeles Service Integration Action Plan, and promote the adoption of such standards.	Child Care Planning Committee	By December 2008, implement customer service standards for all child care-related service agencies.
<b>Strategy 5</b>			
Increase the connections between child care and development, health and social services, and other providers to ensure that children's developmental needs are met within the context of the family and the child's child care environment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By March 2004, identify program/service models which foster connections between child care providers and other health and social service providers; and</li> <li>2. By January 2005, create more connections for home- and center-based providers with community-based services for children with disabilities and other special needs (see Outcome Area III, Strategy 2).</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Planning Committee</li> <li>• Pathways, lead for SNAP Collaborative</li> </ul>	By January 2013, at least 25 percent of all licensed child care providers will have working relationships with health, mental health, early intervention, and other service specialists.

## **Section III. Conclusion**

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The implementation of this Strategic Plan will require the coordinated efforts of individuals, groups, agencies, and government bodies. The Plan, taken as a whole, is a vision of what the child care and development infrastructure should be in the County of Los Angeles. Each goal is a “destination point,” each objective a “route.” The Plan gives direction to the efforts of hundreds of stakeholders throughout the County.

The County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee will be responsible, on an ongoing basis, for coordinating implementation and monitoring progress toward achieving the goals of this Strategic Plan. The landscape in which we construct the Strategic Plan, and fill out its contours, is evolving, even as we measure progress. A steady focus on the ultimate vision as described by the Outcome Areas is necessary. At the same time, all those working to implement the Plan must be ready to shift emphases, strategies, or timing in order to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves, or to find ways around unforeseen barriers, while maintaining a focus on the ultimate outcomes.

## ***Appendix A***

### ***Outcome Area I: Consistently High-Quality Child Care***

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#### ***Overview***

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Child development researchers and practitioners have reached agreement on the elements essential for high-quality child care:

- Children are cared for in small groups (adjusted for age of children);
- Each adult worker is responsible for only a few children to encourage development of healthy adult-child relationships;
- Staff/providers are well-prepared and adequately paid to promote continuity of care;
- The environment is safe and comfortable;
- The program/provider encourages parent involvement; and
- Children and families are linked to comprehensive health/mental and social services.

Unfortunately, studies show that quality child care is the exception rather than the rule. There are established accreditation programs through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC), and the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA). These accreditation programs measure the components of quality described above. Currently, in the County of Los Angeles, only 132 center-based programs are accredited. That represents less than five percent of all licensed center-based programs. Of the 10,000 licensed family child care homes in the County of Los Angeles, only six are accredited at this time.

Many centers and homes are interested in attaining accreditation status. However, most are not ready to take on the arduous self-evaluation process, or are unable to meet the core standards. With the exception of Head Start and California Department of Education/Child Development Division (CDE/CDD)–funded centers, there is no evaluation of quality beyond the very basic licensing requirements. For programs that do not require a license, there are no standards, except those chosen by the managing individual or organization. At the same time, we know that:

- High-quality child care positively predicts children's academic performances well into their school careers;<sup>1</sup>
- Children who have traditionally been at risk of not doing well in school are affected more than other children by the quality of their child care experiences;<sup>1</sup>
- The quality of child care classroom practices is related to children's cognitive development, and the closeness of the teacher-child relationship influences children's social development through the early school years; and<sup>1</sup>
- Nationally, 70 percent of licensed child care is considered mediocre or worse, with 12 percent considered detrimental to the development of children.<sup>1</sup>



***Outcome Area II: Well-Qualified and Well-Compensated Workforce***

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*Overview*

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Perhaps, the best indicators of quality in child care and development are the level of teacher/provider education and training and the level of compensation. A beautiful building, an enriched curriculum, and state-of-the-art equipment and materials mean little if the adults do not understand child development and how to relate to children in ways that are meaningful to them. Teachers and providers must be able to facilitate individual growth within the context of the group. Higher rates of compensation and adequate benefits are required to recruit and retain teachers and providers with such qualifications and capabilities.

Currently, individuals who work in the field of child care and development demonstrate a wide range of skills and educational attainment. The range includes those with no formal training and those with doctoral degrees. While wages have inched up slowly, they lag far behind those of other occupations with similar requirements, and tend to reflect wages of the less-educated segments of the child care industry.<sup>1</sup> To attract and retain the number of qualified individuals required to provide needed quality child care, action must be taken to increase wages and benefits of child care and development workers to a level comparable to those of similarly-qualified workers in other fields.

The issue of inadequate compensation cannot be addressed without also addressing the issue of standards for those who care for children. The quality of care is directly related to the level of preparation of the caregiver.<sup>1</sup> Because the work of caring for and educating our society's younger members is so important, we must expect all teachers and providers to demonstrate core competencies and meet improved standards of training and education.

Qualification and compensation are two sides of a single coin representing the true cost of a high-quality system of care for young children. Financial investments from many sources are required to meet higher compensation standards and retain high-quality personnel. Recruiting and retaining qualified personnel is key to meeting the capacity and quality goals as outlined in this Strategic Plan.

***Outcome Area III: Access to a Sufficient Supply of Child Care***

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***Overview***

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According to *Child Care Counts (2000)*, there is a shortfall of approximately 300,000 spaces in full-day licensed child care in the County of Los Angeles. The greatest unmet child care needs are for full-day infant/toddler care and full/part-day school-age care. Furthermore, there are gaps in both the geographic demand and availability of care to meet the particular needs of specific ethnic/language groups within the County. For families with children who have special needs, the lack of available care is even more profound. Only 28 percent of all providers and programs are able to offer care for children with chronic health or physical disabilities.<sup>1</sup> This means that few licensed spaces in typical child care settings are available for children with disabilities and other special needs. The full-range of disabilities and other special needs of children must be addressed in developing an adequate supply of early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment options.

License-exempt care options may be encouraged as a way of addressing the lack of licensed care. Licensed-exempt care, if meeting the child's need for nurturing and developmental opportunities, can alleviate some of the pressure for more licensed care. However, families currently using exempt care may prefer more regulated care options that are not currently available. In addition, because there are almost no formal standards of quality applied to exempt-care arrangements, this type of care cannot be considered the only solution for growing the infrastructure and increasing availability of care.

Licensed family child care has traditionally been the "quick fix" when it comes to increasing capacity. Family child care providers can be licensed within a short time, and do not require much capital or other resources to meet licensing standards. However, the drop-out rate for family child care providers is very high, 16.5 percent per year, nationally, and higher in specific areas.<sup>1</sup> Successful family child care providers have managed to ride-out the first few years when new businesses are usually shaky. Much more could be done to assist and support new family child care providers through this vulnerable period to ensure a more stable population of viable family child care homes.

Creating more home-based or center care (whether licensed or license-exempt) must take into consideration issues related to financing and quality:

- Who will use the care created?
- How well do providers/programs meet appropriate quality standards?
- How will the cost of care be covered to ensure that compensation for staff/providers is adequate to recruit and retain qualified individuals?
- Where will qualified personnel come from to provide care?

The answers to these questions are important considerations in building capacity that also creates an infrastructure that appropriately addresses the needs of families for high-quality and affordable child care and development.

**Outcome Area IV: Affordable Access to Child Care**

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*Overview*

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Quality costs money! Quality programs are costly to operate because they must attract and retain qualified staff while maintaining facilities, equipment, supplies, and financing essential administration and overhead. Quality early care and education is difficult for most families to afford. Moreover, as low-wage jobs continue to dominate the County's employment growth, and welfare recipients join the workforce in increasing numbers, the need for subsidies to maintain children in quality educational environments must grow dramatically.

Consider these statistics:

- For a family of four with a California median income of \$42,380 (year 2000), licensed care for two children (infant and older child) requires 32 percent of a family's net income;<sup>1</sup>
- For a single-income household, where the parent earns minimum wage (\$14,040), licensed infant care requires 61 percent of net income;<sup>1</sup>
- The cost of child care in the County of Los Angeles is between two-and-a-half and four-times the cost of tuition at a California State University (\$1,839 per year);<sup>1</sup> and
- The cost of child care in the County of Los Angeles can be as high as twice the cost of tuition at the University of California (\$3,859 per year).<sup>1</sup>

It is clear why so many low-income working families are unable to access stable, high-quality early care and education and supervised school-age enrichment services. There are approximately 70,000 eligible children of all ages on waiting lists for subsidized child care in the County of Los Angeles. Frequently unrecognized is the fact that child care costs are a significant expenditure for moderate-income families. These are families who will never qualify for subsidized child care, but must find and pay for quality child care in a market with an imbalance between supply and demand.

Over the last 20 years, employers have begun to play a role in addressing this issue. Business interest has guided many employers to provide some type of support in order to attract and retain a qualified workforce. Entertainment corporations, law firms, financial institutions, government agencies, and hospitals are among the various industries represented in the arena of "employer-supported child care." However, these employers represent only a small fraction of all employers who benefit from the child care and development infrastructure, which enables their employees to work.

***Outcome Area V: Customer-Focused Infrastructure***

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*Overview*

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Navigating the system of child care and development can be a daunting task for parents needing services in the County of Los Angeles. For parents with limited resources, making appropriate care arrangements and understanding the eligibility criteria and limits of service can be particularly frustrating and difficult. The same holds true for providers working with various payment agencies, Child Care Resource and Referral Programs, the State regulatory agency, and Department of Social Services/Community Care Licensing. Even parents with above-average incomes have difficulty identifying sources of good information about finding and choosing child care.

Every year hundreds of millions of dollars flow into the County of Los Angeles for subsidized child care services from more than a dozen government programs, through over 150 contractors. Each program has varying eligibility criteria, regulations, and documentation requirements, leading to an overly complex and fragmented system. Extensive staff training is required in order to administer these programs. Despite current training efforts, staff frequently function without a complete understanding of a program's eligibility requirements. Inexperienced and uninformed staff may not provide all of the information and guidance a parent would need.

The quality of customer service provided by public and private agencies is diminished by fragmented regulations in current program administration, and by the lack of professional knowledge and demeanor on the part of agency/program staff. This in turn, limits parents' access to vitally needed services.

**Forging the Future: A Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development**  
**Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee**

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*End Notes*

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- <sup>1</sup> Kotulak, R. 1996. *Inside the Brain: Discoveries of How the Mind Works*. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel.
- <sup>2</sup> Shore, R. *Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Development*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- <sup>3</sup> Phillips D., and Shonkoff J. 2000. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.
- <sup>4</sup> *Caring for Our Children: Our Most Precious Investment*, California: Little Hoover Commission, 1998
- <sup>5</sup> Bowman, B., Donovan, M.S., and Burns, M.S. Eds. 2000. *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.
- <sup>6</sup> Morgan, D. 2000. *A Common Infrastructure for an Early Care and Education System*. Boston: Wheelock College
- <sup>7</sup> Howes, C., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Culkin, M., Kagan, S. 1999. *The Children of Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go To School: Technical Report*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.
- <sup>8</sup> *Child Care Counts: An Analysis of the Supply and Demand for Early Care and Education Services in Los Angeles County*, 2000. Los Angeles: Child Care Planning Committee of the County of Los Angeles.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.